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ABSTRACT

This report discusses critical social issues linked to teen pregnancy, explaining that teen pregnancy prevention should be viewed as working to improve these social issues. After providing general background on teen pregnancy, the report offers five fact sheets: (1) "Teen Pregnancy, Welfare Dependency, and Poverty" (continuing to reduce teen pregnancy will sustain recent decreases in welfare dependency and poverty); (2) "Teen Pregnancy and Child Well-Being" (children of teen mothers are at significantly increased risk for many economic, social, and health problems); (3) "Teen Pregnancy, Out-of-Wedlock Births, and Marriage" (reducing teen pregnancy will increase the percentage of children born to married couples); (4) "Teen Pregnancy and Responsible Fatherhood" (children of teen parents are often denied a close connection with their fathers, and reducing teen pregnancy contributes significantly to the promotion of responsible fatherhood); and (5) "Teen Pregnancy and Workforce Development" (teen pregnancy and early parenthood often short-circuit the education process and prevent young people from preparing themselves for good jobs and becoming established in the labor market). (SM)

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Not Just Another Single Issue:

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Not Just Another Single Issue:

Teen Pregnancy Prevention's Link to Other Critical Social Issues

Teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues — welfare dependency and overall child well-being, out-of-wedlock births, responsible fatherhood, and workforce development in particular. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy believes that preventing teen pregnancy should be viewed not only as a reproductive health issue, but as one that works to improve all of these measures. Simply put, if more children in this country were born to parents who are ready and able to care for them, we would see a significant reduction in a host of social problems afflicting children in the United States, from school failure and crime to child abuse and neglect.

The facts compiled below provide compelling evidence that progress on all of these issues is materially advanced by reducing teen pregnancy. We urge policymakers, advocates, and others interested in one or more of these social policy issues to give serious attention to preventing teen pregnancy and to be encouraged by the growing variety of effective interventions as well as the strong public consensus that teen pregnancy is a serious problem which needs to be addressed.

We begin by providing some general background about teen pregnancy, including why it is still a major problem, some key facts and trends, and why helping reduce rates of teen pregnancy is a good investment. This general information is followed by five fact sheets which can be used separately or together:

Teen Pregnancy, Welfare Dependency, and Poverty
Teen Pregnancy and Child Well-Being
Teen Pregnancy, Out-of-Wedlock Births, and Marriage
Teen Pregnancy and Responsible Fatherhood
Teen Pregnancy and Workforce Development

Since some of the facts and explanatory text are relevant to more than one issue, there is necessarily some duplication among the fact sheets. Additional information on a number of these issues can be found in the National Campaign's more detailed publications (see www.teenpregnancy.org for more information).

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Teen Pregnancy Is Still a Major Problem

Less sexual activity among teens and increased contraceptive use have both contributed to the encouraging declines in the teen pregnancy and birth rates during the 1990s.[1] Teen pregnancy rates are at their lowest level in 20 years and teen birth rates are at the lowest level ever recorded in this country.[2] These trends show that progress can be made on what was once seen as an intractable social problem. However, we still have a long way to go:

- Despite the recent good news, the United States still has the *highest* rates of teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion in the fully industrialized world.[3]
- Four in ten girls become pregnant at least once before age 20 — over 900,000 teen pregnancies annually.[4]
- There are nearly half a million teen births each year. Put another way, each hour nearly 100 teen girls get pregnant and 55 give birth.[5]
- About 40 percent of pregnant teens are 17 or younger.[6]
- Nearly eight in ten pregnancies among teens are not planned or intended.[7]
- At present, 79 percent of births to teen mothers are out-of-wedlock — a dramatically different picture from 30 years ago when the vast majority of births to teen mothers were within marriage.[8]
- Some teens are having sex earlier. One major data set indicates that the only group of teen girls showing an increase in sexual activity is those under age 15. And, a 1999 study indicated that 8.3 percent of students report having sex before age 13 — a disturbing 15 percent increase since 1997.[9]
- Many of the fathers of children born to teen mothers are older; almost half of young men who impregnate a minor teen (under 18) are three or more years older.[10]
- The overall declines have masked high rates that exist for certain teens, defined by geography, age, and racial or ethnic group. For example, in some states, the teen pregnancy problem has gotten worse in selected communities.[11]
- Among Hispanics, the fastest growing ethnic group in the nation, teen birth rates have declined more slowly than for other groups over the 1990s and Hispanics now have the highest teen birth rate nationally. Birth rates for Hispanic teens have actually increased in a number of states.[12]
- Between 1995 and 2010, the number of girls aged 15-19 will increase by 2.2 million. [13] If current fertility rates remain the same, we will see a 26 percent increase in the number of pregnancies and births among teenagers.[14]

Guarding Against Complacency

The 1990s have brought good news: Both teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined nationwide, in all states, and among all age and racial/ethnic groups. However, this progress in preventing teen pregnancy can have a downside if it means that the public, policymakers, and the media begin to believe that the teen pregnancy problem has been solved. The hard truth is that yesterday's good news about declining teen pregnancy and birth rates won't mean much to the boys and girls who turn 13 next year. We must guard against complacency, and we must redouble our efforts to convince each new group of young people that it is in their own self-interest and that of future generations to avoid early pregnancy and child-bearing.

The Bottom Line: Teen Pregnancy Prevention is a Good Investment

Not only does teen childbearing have serious consequences for teen parents, their children, and society; it also has important economic consequences. Helping young women avoid too-early pregnancy and childbearing — and young men avoid premature fatherhood — is easier and much more cost effective than dealing with all of the problems that occur after the babies are born.

- Teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least $7 billion each year in direct costs associated with health care, foster care, criminal justice, and public assistance, as well as lost tax revenues.[15]
- A cost benefit analysis suggests that the government could spend up to eight times more than is currently being spent on teen pregnancy prevention and still break even.[16]
- A study estimating the cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit of one particular curriculum found that for every dollar invested in the program, $2.65 in total medical and social costs were saved. The savings were produced by preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).[17]
- If teen birth rates had stayed at the level they were in the early 1990s, 125,468 thousand more babies would have been born to teens.[18]

Not Just Another Single Issue:

Teen Pregnancy, Welfare Dependency, and Poverty

Continuing to reduce teen pregnancy will sustain the recent decreases in welfare dependency and poverty, especially persistent child poverty. Poverty is a cause as well as a consequence of early childbearing, and some impoverished young mothers may end up faring poorly no matter when their children are born. Nevertheless, most experts agree that although disadvantaged backgrounds account for many of the burdens that young women shoulder, having a baby during adolescence only makes matters worse:

- Compared to women of similar social-economic status who postpone childbearing, teen mothers are more likely to end up on welfare.[19]
- Almost one-half of all teen mothers and over three-quarters of unmarried teen mothers began receiving welfare within five years of the birth of their first child.[20]
- Some 52 percent of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager.[21]
- Teen mothers are less likely to complete the education necessary to qualify for a well-paying job — only 41 percent of mothers who have children before age 18 ever complete high school compared with 61 percent of similarly situated young women who delay child bearing until age 20 or 21.[22]
- Virtually all of the increase in child poverty between 1980 and 1996 was related to the increase in nonmarital childbearing, and half of never-married mothers begin their childbearing as teens.[23]
- Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor.[24]
- Nearly 80 percent of fathers of children born to teen mothers do not marry the mothers. These fathers pay less than $800 annually in child support, often because they are quite poor themselves.[25] Since child support can be an important source of income for poor children, children born to young fathers are at further disadvantage.
- Teen mothers are likely to have a second birth relatively soon — about one-fourth of teenage mothers have a second child within 24 months of the first birth — which can further impede their ability to finish school or keep a job, and to escape poverty.[26]

In addition to the goal of moving welfare recipients into work, the 1996 federal welfare reform law placed a strong emphasis on reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing and teen pregnancy. Welfare caseloads have declined dramatically since 1996 and millions of low-income parents have moved into the labor force. Child poverty rates have also declined significantly. However, this progress could be short-lived if every welfare recipient who goes to work and begins moving toward self-sufficiency is replaced by a pregnant younger sister, or daughter, who is not prepared to support a family. To sustain the progress made to date, it is important to implement policies and invest resources that help young people — both girls and boys — avoid premature pregnancy and childbearing.

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Not Just Another Single Issue:

Teen Pregnancy and Child Well-Being

Reducing teen pregnancy will enhance child well-being. The children of teen mothers bear the greatest burden of teen pregnancy and childbearing, and are at significantly increased risk for a number of economic, social, and health problems:

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birthweight,[27] raising the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.[28]
- Children of teen mothers do worse in school than those born to older parents. They are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, are less likely to complete high school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.[29]
- The children of teen parents also suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect than would occur if their mothers had delayed childbearing.[30]
- The sons of teen mothers are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison.[31]
- The daughters of teen parents are 22 percent more likely to become teen mothers themselves.[32]

A key conclusion that emerges from all these sobering facts is this: Preventing teen pregnancy is critical to improving not only the lives of young women and men but also the future prospects of their children. Indeed, one of the surest ways to improve overall child well-being is to reduce the proportion of children born to teen mothers.

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Not Just Another Single Issue:

Teen Pregnancy, Out-of-Wedlock Births, and Marriage

Reducing teen pregnancy will decease out-of-wedlock childbearing and increase the percentage of children born to married couples. While the majority of non-marital births are to adult women, the teen years are frequently a time when unmarried families are first formed — a strong rationale for focusing on teens in any broad effort to reduce out-of-wedlock childbearing.

- Although only three out of ten out-of-wedlock births in the United States are to teenagers, nearly half (48 percent) of all non-marital *first* births occur to teens — the largest single group.[33]
- Nearly 80 percent of teen births are to unmarried teens, up from 15 percent in 1960.[34]
- Men and women today marry, on average, three to four years later than did their counterparts in the 1950s.[35] As a result of later marriage and both earlier menarche and earlier age of first sex, teens today begin having sex roughly eight years before marriage.[36]
- In contrast with the 1960s and 1970s, when most of the growth of single-parent families was caused by increases in divorce or separation, nearly all of the growth in the 1980s and 1990s has been driven by increases in out-of-wedlock childbearing.[37]
- Teen mothers spend more of their young adults years as single parents than do women who delay childbearing.[38]
- Only 30 percent of teen mothers who marry after their child is born remain in those marriages and teen marriages are twice as likely to fail as marriages in which the woman is at least 25 years old.[39]
- Teenagers who have a non-marital birth are significantly less likely to be married by the age of 35 than those who do not have babies as teens.[40]
- Children in single-parent families are more likely to get pregnant as teenagers than their peers who grow up with two parents.[41]
- The reduction in the teen birthrate has contributed to the leveling off after 1994 of the proportion of children born outside marriage.[42]
- Since 30 percent of teen pregnancies end in abortion, and teens account for 20 percent of all abortions performed annually, preventing teen pregnancy also has the advantage of reducing abortions. It is important to note that since 1990, the teen pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates have all declined steadily.[43]

Clearly, helping more women reach adulthood before they have children would go a long way toward ensuring that more children grow up in stable, married families. And considering the large body of research on the benefits to children of growing up in such families, the link between reducing teen pregnancies and improving overall child well-being is clear.

Not Just Another Single Issue:

Teen Pregnancy and Responsible Fatherhood

Reducing teen pregnancy contributes significantly to the goal of promoting responsible fatherhood. Research shows that involved and committed fathers are important to the well-being of their children. But unfortunately, children born to teen parents are often denied a close connection with their father because the relationship between their parents is more likely to dissolve over time.

- Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poor than children with both parents at home.[44]
- Boys and girls without involved fathers are twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, twice as likely to end up in jail, and nearly four times more likely to need help for emotional or behavioral problems.[45]
- Over two decades of research confirms that parents — both fathers and mothers — are an important influence on whether their teenagers become pregnant or cause a pregnancy.[46]

There is growing attention to the responsibilities of boys and young men in preventing teen pregnancy. At last count, 40 states had strategies to prevent unwanted or too-early fatherhood.[47] This emphasis on primary prevention for boys and men is a welcome trend. Still, too many young men are not waiting until they are ready — emotionally and financially — to become fathers:

- The good news is that sexual activity among teenage boys is declining.[48]
- The best available data show that after increasing 32 percent between 1986 and 1991, the teen birth rate for fathers aged 15-19 remained fairly constant until 1994, then decreased 16 percent between 1994 and 1999.[49] These data also show that approximately 168,000 babies born to teen mothers in 1999 had fathers under age 20.[50]
- Eight of 10 teen fathers do not marry the mothers of these children.[51]
- Absent fathers of teen mothers pay less than $800 annually for child support, often because they are quite poor themselves.[52]
- Some research suggests that teen fathers have lower levels of education and suffer earning loses of 10-15 percent annually than teens who do not father children.[53]

Clearly, more needs to be done to send a strong message to teen boys and young men that they should wait to become a father until they are ready to have a lasting — ideally married — relationship to the mother of their children and are able meet their financial and emotional responsibilities to their children. In addition, there is more that should be done to build on efforts within the teen pregnancy prevention field to reach out to boys and young men through what are sometimes called "male involvement programs." It is also important to recognize and support the important role that fathers can play in helping their own sons and daughters avoid becoming teen parents.

Not Just Another Single Issue:

Teen Pregnancy and Workforce Development

Reducing teen pregnancy will strengthen the future U.S. workforce. Today's economy demands a sophisticated and educated workforce. But teen pregnancy and too-early parenthood often short circuit the education process and prevent young men and women from preparing themselves for good jobs and becoming established in the labor market.

- Teen parents and their children are less likely to graduate from high school. In fact, less than four of 10 teen mothers who begin their families before age 18 ever complete high school.[54]
- In the past 25 years, the median income for college graduates has increased 13 percent, while median income for high school dropouts has decreased 30 percent.[55]
- Fully half of teen mothers drop out of school *before* becoming pregnant.[56]
- When compared to similarly situated women who delay childbearing until age 20 or 21, teen mothers and their children experience a number of adverse social and economic consequences. For example, 52 percent of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager.[57]

When children have children, their opportunities are diminished right from the start, and the future is often one of poverty. That's not good for business. The business community has a vested interest in preventing teen pregnancy and childbearing because of the associated financial, social, and workforce-related consequences. If teens can delay parenthood, they will have the time and resources they need for their education and training, which are crucial to a productive workforce in an increasingly high-tech world.

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THE

NATIONAL

CAMPAIGN TO

PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, non-governmental organization supported almost entirely by private donations. The Campaign's mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. The Campaign's goal is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by one-third between 1996 and 2005.

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